



News Release

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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Airman Missing From WWII Accounted For

The Department of Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) announced today that the remains of a U.S. serviceman, missing since World War II, have been identified and are being returned to his family for burial with full military honors.

U.S. Army Air Forces 1st Lt. James F. Gatlin, 25, of Jacksonville, Fla., will be buried Jan. 30, in Bushnell, Fla. On Dec. 23, 1944, Gatlin and his crew of five were assigned to the 575th Bombardment Squadron, 391st Bombardment Group, 9th Air Force and were deployed to Germany. Gatlin was a co-pilot of a B-26C Marauder that crashed after being struck by enemy fire while on a bombing mission against enemy forces near Ahrweiler, Germany. Gatlin and four other crew members were reported killed in action. His remains were not recovered during the war.

One of the crew members parachuted from the aircraft but was captured and held as a prisoner of war by German forces. Following his release, he reported to U. S. officials that he had no knowledge of the fate of the remaining crewmen.

Following the war, the American Graves Registration Command (AGRC) conducted investigations on the loss of Gatlin and his crew and successfully located the crash site, near Manderscheid and Bettenfeld. The remains of two crewmen were recovered.

On May 27, 1999, a U.S. team investigating World War II losses in Germany visited a crash site near Bettenfeld. Two German nationals had researched the crash site and showed the team artifacts that were found and turned over remains collected from the site. Those remains were identified as Army Air Forces Staff Sgt. Joe R. Sanchez, 20, of Los Nietos, Calif. He was accounted for in March 2011, and returned to his family for burial with full military honors.

Between 2011 and 2014, Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) teams traveled to Bettenfeld and conducted operations at the crash site.

To identify Gatlin's remains, scientists from JPAC and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory (AFDIL) used forensic identification tools to include mitochondrial DNA, which matched his cousins.

Of the 16 million Americans who served in World War II, more than 400,000 died. Today, more than 73,000 are unaccounted for from the conflict.

For additional information on the Defense Department's mission to account for Americans, who went missing while serving our country, visit our web site at www.dtic.mil/dpmo or call (703) 699-1169.

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